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SUBJECT: ICELAND IWC COMMISSIONER PESSIMISTIC ON PROGRESS IN
UPCOMING IWC MEETING

REFS: A) State 57319 B) Reykjavik 105 C) Evans - Field emails D) 06 Reykjavik 388

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Iceland's Whaling Commissioner Stefan Asmundsson told post that he is pessimistic that any progress will be made in the upcoming International Whaling Commission meeting in Chile. Asmundsson was careful not to criticize the IWC Chairman Bill Hogarth but is worried that the focus on consensus building will not help tackle more substantive issues. Asmundsson was positive about a small working group, provided it is small and has a good mix of members. Regarding the recent trade of fin whale meat with Japan, Asmundsson said it was perfectly legal and opined the IWC cannot expect a "status quo" of no whaling while discussions continue within the IWC. Asmundsson also brushed aside the recent reduction of recommended minke hunt from 400 to 100 as an issue of stock distribution, not stock endangerment. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Econoff presented ref A points to Iceland's Whaling Commissioner Stefan Asmundsson on June 6. Asmundsson said that his concern with Bill Hogarth's chairmanship was that the strong focus on consensus and making sure that everyone around the table behaves as friends is circumventing the issue a bit. He hopes that the upcoming meeting in Santiago will be more substantive. Asmundsson quickly said that he understood Hogarth's task was tough and said "this is not a criticism of Bill," but he opined that nothing will happen in Santiago if the underlying politics are not addressed.

¶3. (SBU) Asmundsson was familiar with the small working group idea and said, "we already did miniaturization under Henrik Fischer" which was unsuccessful because of political reasons. Asmundsson believed that Fischer did get the mix of the group right -- by leaving out the extremes such as Australia and Norway. This time around Asmundsson believes a good mix for the small groups would be Iceland, Japan, U.S., possibly Spain, Netherlands, Denmark, but definitely not Australia. He was not concerned about "too small" a size but rather "too large." Asmundsson said double digits were not a good idea because of the need for intimacy. He also went on at length about the need to include countries that are likely to build middle ground and he stressed that moderate countries need to distance themselves from the anti-whaling countries. He said what did not work ten years ago was that the parties did not have the political backing to finalize the solution.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding procedural improvements mentioned in the March intersessional, Asmundsson said Iceland can go along with many of the procedures mentioned. He stressed however, that procedures do not address the fundamental issues and described it as "going around the issue."

¶5. (SBU) When directly asked whether the recent shipment of whale meat to Japan (Ref B) will affect this year's negotiations, Asmundsson said the trade was legal and thought it would not have an effect. He said that Iceland's position has been clear since it resumed commercial whaling in October 2006 and that trade was implicit with that decision (Ref D). Asmundsson said this just showed the problems with the IWC and that action needed to happen fast if one wanted the IWC to have a role. He continued with "you

can't expect a status quo while discussions continue in the IWC" and later went on to say, "unless the IWC improves, things will continue outside the IWC. It's not what we want, but that's what we have."

¶16. (SBU) When Econoff raised further questions regarding future trade with Japan (Ref C), Asmundsson responded that the transaction was not a government operation and the decision to trade had already been made in 2006. He noted that the 2006 quota had expired, so if Kristjan Loftsson, the only fin whaler in Iceland, wanted to hunt fins, he would have to ask for a new quota. Asmundsson did not reveal whether Loftsson had filed such a request, but did say "I wouldn't rule out" a new fin whale quota.

¶17. (SBU) Regarding the recent media reports that the Icelandic Marine Research Institute revised their recommendation for a sustainable quota for minke whales from 400 animals in 2007 to 100 animals in 2008, Asmundsson said it was an issue of stock distribution, not stock size. Asmundsson said there is no indication of a collapse in minke whale stock as skinny animals would have been observed. He noted that the commercial minke quota of 40 animals (Ref B) this year showed that Iceland takes sustainability seriously.

VAN VOORST